

Why there's no such thing as a healthy tippie

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Claims that the occasional alcoholic drink can be beneficial for your health will be soundly debunked at the British Science Festival in Chelmsford on Wednesday, 8 September.

Alcohol is big business and is currently the largest consumer goods

category in the UK. Alcohol consumption at home has increased in the UK during the Covid-19 pandemic while at the same time, confusion still exists around the [health impact](#) of low to moderate drinking.

In his talk Healthy Hearts and The Alcohol Dilemma, Dr. Rudolph Schutte of Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) will discuss his own research – involving 446,439 participants recruited as part of the UK Biobank study – and explain how previous studies showing the alleged benefits of low-level alcohol consumption are riddled with errors.

Dr. Schutte's research, published in the journal *Clinical Nutrition*, followed the UK Biobank participants over an average of seven years and found that low-level consumption of beer, cider and spirits was associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular events, coronary heart disease, [cerebrovascular disease](#) such as stroke, cancer, and overall mortality.

The only health benefit that Dr. Schutte's study discovered was a decreased risk of coronary heart disease through the consumption of wine.

Previous studies into alcohol and health have identified a J-shaped curve, indicating that low levels of alcohol consumption can be beneficial. However, Dr. Schutte believes these studies are incorrectly making comparisons with non-drinkers. He also believes the benefits obtained from wine and champagne are thanks to polyphenols, which are antioxidants, found naturally within the grapes, and not necessarily through the alcohol.

Dr. Schutte, Course Leader for the BSc Medical Science program and Associate Professor at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), explained:

"A group of non-drinkers will contain individuals who abstain from

alcohol due to various pre-existing health reasons, making this reference group surprisingly high-risk."

"Comparing a group of low to moderate drinkers to this 'risky' reference group of non-drinkers could wrongly indicate that alcohol is beneficial to health. This is the main driver of the trough of the J-shaped curve."

"There is an undeniable protective beneficial relationship between coronary heart disease and consumption of both red and white wine. However, this is only seen with coronary heart disease and none of the other cardiovascular diseases."

"This relationship is also seen for alcohol-free wine, so it suggests the benefits are thanks to the polyphenols in the wine rather than the alcohol. Researchers commonly use [coronary heart disease](#) as a standard measure for health and this is one of the reasons we see so many studies claiming the health benefits of 'alcohol'."

"The current recommendations in the UK are to drink no more than 14 units of alcohol a week. This equates to seven pints of average-strength beer, around nine glasses of 125 ml wine, or 14 single measures of spirits. However, our findings show that even low levels of [alcohol consumption](#) can be damaging to our health."

Provided by Anglia Ruskin University

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